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SIPDIS

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OSD FOR POPOVICH

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SUBJECT: ZAGREB WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT - JANUARY 22, 2009

1. (U) EMBASSY HOSTS INAUGURATION RECEPTION AT AMERICAN CORNER ZAGREB:

Embassy Zagreb hosted an inauguration event January 20 at the American Corner located at a downtown Zagreb library. The reception targeted young Croatian academic, business and political leaders to give them the opportunity to see live inauguration coverage of President-elect Barack Obama including his swearing in, inaugural address and other program events. Other Croatian library patrons including university students were also able to watch the inauguration on televisions provided by the Embassy. Approximately 75 Croatians, including guests from political parties, NGOs, government ministries, think-tanks, journalists, and previous Fulbright, Ron Brown, and Ben Franklin fellows attended the event. The event was covered by the national Hrvatska Radio Televizija (HRT) station as well as on radio and in the major daily newspapers. Ambassador Robert Bradtke gave interviews to the press after the inaugural address. The event gave young political, social, and economic Croatian leaders a chance to witness the beginning of the Obama administration and emphasized the continuing partnership between U.S. and Croatia under the new administration. (TBullock)

2. (U) CROATIAN MEDIA OPTIMISTIC ABOUT U.S. - CROATIA TRAVEL SECURITY DECLARATION:

The January 19 signing in D.C. of a Croatia - U.S. Declaration on Travel Security received positive media coverage in Croatia, ranging from optimism to moderation on Croatia's prospects for joining the visa waiver program. Croatian national newspapers Slobodna Dalmacija and Vjesnik carried optimistic articles predicting Croatia would qualify for the visa waiver program in 18 months. Rijeka-based Novi List factually reported that the declaration was an agreement to improve travel security between the two countries which would benefit Croatia's progress towards the visa waiver program. Media coverage of the declaration helped to clarify for the Croatian public and government officials the steps necessary for membership in the VWP. (TBullock)

3. (U) PRESIDENT MESIC CRITICIZES CROATIA'S PERMREP TO THE UN FOR ANGERING LIBYA:

President Mesic, during a radio interview on January 19, blamed Croatian UN PermRep Neven Jurica for Libya's rebuff of Croatia's request for Libyan natural gas shipments during the recent gas crisis. While press reports said Libya rejected Croatia's offer to purchase gas because it had no supplies available, according to Mesic, Libya's leader, Muammar al-Qaddafi, is still angry at Croatia for Jurica's walkout from an April 2008 Security Council session in response to remarks by the Libyan PermRep comparing the situation in the Gaza Strip with the Nazi Holocaust. In his comment, Mesic did not mention that Jurica was joined in the

walkout by the representatives of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Belgium, and Costa Rica. Despite press speculation, Mesic has not taken any steps to try and get the government to remove Jurica from his post, but publicly emphasized that he had scolded Jurica for his actions and reminded him that it was because of the support of non-aligned countries, such as Libya, that Croatia was on Security Council. (DMeges)

14. (U) COALITIONS TAKE SHAPE IN OSIJEK MAYOR RACE:
The Croatian Party of Rights (HSP) announced on January 14 that it would partner with the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) for May 2009 local elections in the eastern city of Osijek, where right-wing parties are more influential than perhaps anywhere else in Croatia. This alliance with the HDZ comes only days after the HSP's current coalition partners, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Croatian Peoples Party (HNS), refused to support Djapic's candidacy for mayorship of Osijek, due to a corruption scandal over some of Djapic's real estate deals. The deal with the HDZ will require the HSP to support HDZ's candidate for county prefect in the Osijek region, and to support the HDZ's candidates for mayor and county prefect in many other races across the country. Centrist and center-left parties such as the SDP and the Croatian Social Liberal party will likely run their own candidates. As will the far-right Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja (HDSSB),

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with indicted war criminal Branimir Glavas heading the list for mayor and city council and incumbent county prefect Kresimir Bubalo as a candidate for re-election to that office. (DMeges)
BRADTKE